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Lord of each pang the nerves can feel,
Hence, with the rack & reeking wheel.
Hark! truth proclaims, thy triumphs cease:
Her heavenly form, with glowing hand,
Benignly points to piety and peace.
She smiles! and where is now the cloud
That blackened o'er thy baleful reign?
Grim darkness pants his leaden shroud,
Shrinking from her glance in vain.
Her touch unlocks the day-spring from above,
And lo! it visits man with beams of light & love!

ROGERS.

IT has long been a matter of observation, that ignorance is the mother of superstition; and that wheresoever the latter exerts her blasting influence, true religion fades and withers like the verdant shrub before the destroying progress of the Simoom. Hence it follows, that the tendency of ignorance is

ever ~~to~~ either to corrupt or totally to destroy every vestige of religion; — that superstition, its natural concomitant, as dark in its complexion, as fatal in its progress, but more alluring and more overwhelming, is equally destructive to the interests of Christianity; — and that these two, when conjoined in their infernal league, gradually reduce a church to practical, if not always to theoretical atheism; and pour the flood-tide of desolation over every thing that is lovely, over every thing that would aspire toward heaven, and look from the grovelling scenes of this terrestrial existence to brighter and more durable enjoyments.

Many, we are aware, have been the advocates for keeping a people immersed in mental darkness. Many have been the supporters of systems whose sole object is to shut out the cheering light of day, and suffer the miserable sojourners in this vale of tears to walk in utter ignorance of

the path he is pursuing. Many have been the murderers of the human soul, who with worse than fiendish malignity, have endeavored to destroy every thing that is in man calculated to elevate him in the scale of being; — to withdraw the gaze of his attention from the realms of seraphic light; — and to restrain the flight of those wings, whose course had already commenced, whose ambition was fixed on high, whose perseverance was untired. Under the influence of such men, how many have become, in the words of the poet,

"unfit for earth, undoomed for heaven,"

and beheld every generous feeling, every great, & ennobling thought, stifled in its birth, and sacrificed for the midnight pall of ignorance and blindness!

Such has been the case in the history of man. The middle ages of Europe witnessed the realization of this dark-drawn picture. Darker "than the rage of tempests," was that storm that then brooded over the face of the moral creation. Man

could no longer hailed religion as

"The dove of peace & promise to his ark;" (1)

& gazed upon her in extasy, as the

"——— rainbow to the storms of life!

"The evening beam that smiles the clouds away,

"And tints tomorrow with prophetic ray." (1)

no; that morrow held out no visionary hope; the blackness of death hung over the future. The light of Religion becoming corrupt, superstition usurped its place, and mankind was involved in a long-continued cloud of portentous gloom. In this long, dreary night of desolation and of horror, man, forgetting the principles which ought to have actuated his conduct, rushed headlong into the whirlpool of barbarous crime, whence no earthly arm could raise him, no earthly voice summon him to life. Like the ancient navigator, the first tempest that bore him from the well known coast, plunged him in despair; he dared not to look for the directing star; the mists that enveloped it he was unable of himself

(1) Byron's Bride of Abydos.

to remove; and at length, blind, and infatuated, trembling, and terrified, he bowed his head to the overwhelming wave, and perished in the conflict.

The remembrance of these things has not been lost in the desolating march of time. His withering foot has not obliterated the traces of the past. The hand of history has not forgotten to record them, as an indelible stain on man's blood-stained page. We, who enjoy the benefits of knowledge, and the light of religion, may perhaps be disposed to wonder at the effects then produced by ~~ignor~~ superstition. But man was then the slave of ignorance. The beams of science shone with a weak and glimmering light through the gloom and shadow of death. From the gnawing disquietude of the mind, and the melancholy anxiety of soul, which was the result of ignorance, sprung those numerous & terrifying superstitions, which suspended every faculty, and held mankind in awe;

which dipped the banner of religion in the Stygian wave of crime, prostituted her rites to the basest of purposes, and spread terror to ~~blacken~~ darken the horizon and embitter the cup of human life. From the palace to the cabin, every one bowed before their influence; and the degenerate clergy, taking advantage of this circumstance, swayed the wills of men in accordance to their own desires.

Immersed as the mass of mankind were in the grossest ignorance, all the learning that still was preserved, secluded in the cloister, confined to a few, and the multiplication of books unfrequent and expensive, we can hardly wonder that the populace should be carried away by whatever could give indulgence and encouragement to the darker feelings of the imagination. This the priests well knew; and as it was their interest to keep them still in darkness, and as they knew that the mind must have some

thing whereon to dwell, while they continued to increase the darkness, they heightened the false glare of superstition. The church of Rome, then universal throughout Christendom, wore an imposing air of grandeur and magnificence; the corrupted, but at the same time, solemn rites, filled the mind with a gloomy sublimity. As long as

"— bigot priestcraft dared to bind
"Her gnawing irons on the mind," (2)

the most common events were interpreted into miracles. The spirits of the departed were supposed to hover still over the places of their former residence. There was little to elevate the soul; all seemed comfortless, the fairest scene but a barren desert, and man turned a weary and a dejected eye upon all that surrounded him. With a strange mixture of mistaken devotion and horrid impiety, he hurried forward in his career, committing abominations

(2) Cunningham's de Rancè.

after abomination, and purchasing from those who ought to have warned him of his danger, absolution and supposed forgiveness of his transgressions. But he enjoyed no real happiness. Eager as his pursuit was after the meteors of superstition, they faded when he reached them. Like the 'dim & shadowy' vapor, that hovers over the precipice, they still continued to allure, & still to desolate. If there was a pure and ethereal spirit, it was quenched in utter darkness. If there was a throb of feeling, which would have thrown off the dreadful cloud that surrounded it, it was stifled in its bud. Even the sacred book of God was withheld from the vulgar gaze; and the ritual of worship itself was delivered in a language, which the common people could not understand, and by which they consequently could reap ~~but little~~ no advantage. They turned from the monotonous scene, and took refuge in the storms of war. There

while they polished a few, rendered the mass more ferocious and more degraded. At length, printing was invented. The darkness began by degrees to dissipate; & general knowledge to be more widely diffused; until the bursting in of the Reformation, completed what was before but as the first dawn of the morning; removed at once the mist, and set wide open the portals of the clear & welcome day.

Such was the state of Europe previous to that great and glorious era, whose blessed light disclosed the darkness of superstition, and enabled the suffering victim of her rites to free himself from the bondage. It was the hard & barren rock again struck by the hand of moses, that now emitted ~~spread now~~ the gentle and reviving streams, whose waters, gathering as they advanced, are at this day rolling over the globe in one glorious ocean.

But the consequences already mentioned were not all those attendant on the midnight reign of ignorance and of superstition. In such a state of things as has been described, true religion of course declined; and although the outward forms of it might have been kept up, yet in the greater portion of professing Christians, it was a stranger to their hearts. Conscience herself spoke a deceitful language, and submitting herself to the dictates of sinful flesh, urged man continually on to the commission of further mischief, instead of restraining him.

The last part of our original proposition was, that another consequence of such a state of affairs was the reduction of a church, and we now add, of a state, to atheism, either practical or theoretical, or both. For a proof of this, reference is only to be made to the history of the last fifty years. The continent of Europe has been drenched in blood by the tigers

of atheism. Protestant Europe has in general remained unshaken. The attacks of superstition have only served to root her more firmly on her basis. But Papal Europe, and especially France, the countries, where popery has exerted her utmost power, and superstition has been equally triumphant, have yielded to the torrent of atheism, of infidelity, and of mine. And if indeed the shew of religion is kept up in a great part of papal Europe, yet who is there who can doubt that any of her inhabitants are fit and ready to join hand in hand with the atheist, the oppressor, the murderer? And it is well known, that it has ever been the policy of popery, even since the revival of letters, to keep the populace buried in the same deplorable ignorance, & the same debasing superstitions. We have seen the consequences. Darker ones yet are to be apprehended. The angel of History will weep while

the records the transactions of the nineteenth century; and future ages mourn over the depravity of the days that shall have passed.

When superstition has not even the shadow of Christianity to direct it, it is then debasing indeed. When Heathen impiety joins in her train, there is no hope for man. There is then no principle or rule of moral obligation. Rapine, murder, & lust, are let loose to scourge mankind, & render [redacted] the lords of the creation demons, without a thought of happiness, or a wish for heaven. Or, if such [redacted] thoughts may enter into their bosoms, they are distorted and defaced to the most horrible deformity. What was the state of moral feeling even in the boasted empire of Greece & Rome? And in modern days, let the eye only wander over the plains of Africa, and the shores of Asia. Does

it behold in the absurd rites of the stupid African, ~~the~~ in the blasphemous ceremonies of the self-devoting, & infatuated Hindu, any semblance of truth? — Oh, there is midnight indeed. There is a darkness, in which no single gleam of blessed light appears, but through which the votary of superstition gropes, drenched with blood, & covered with impiety.

The Mahometan religion, which may well be mentioned in this place, as laying a strong hold upon the superstitious propensities of human nature, has contrived to combine within it the extremes of pagan folly with somewhat of the purity of the true religion. Founded by the most successful impostor that perhaps the world ever saw, it continues to lay its benumbing sceptre over the minds of millions.

We may well then say to superstition, in the words of a modern bard,

"Hence to the realms of night, die daemon, hence!
"Thy chain of adamant can bind
"That little world the human mind,
"And sink its noblest powers in impotence."

ROGERS.

Arrayed in alluring garb, she invites the
passing stranger — not to the luscious feast,
and sparkling bowls, but to the scanty
board of famine & despair; — not to scenes
where jocund plenty smiles, & love, &
~~truth~~, & happiness, and peace dance in
eternal and harmonious round, where
the tabret of joy is heard along the vale,
and the pipe & the voice of gladness
echoes on the hill; but to the precipice
of death, dark, deep, & dismal, to the
gulf of eternal ignominy and stupid
forgetfulness. Her voice is indeed heard
warbling its syren strains; ~~and~~ but it
requires all the nerve of the son of
Amicles to withstand her enticements,
or the mark is lain aside, & the votary
becomes the victim. Like the laurel-tree
of Crete, she blooms in all her charms,

and shoots forth apparent fragrance on the verdant valley, to seduce the traveller to repose beneath her shade; a repose, the fatal consequences of which he shall know when it is too late, perhaps even never to awaken from the deadly slumber, blasted and destroyed by the pestiferous vapor that invades his rest.(3)

In a word, in whatever light we view superstition, we behold her always exerting her influence in vitiating the minds as well as the manners of men; in steeling their hearts to all the softer emotions of human nature; in destroying those feelings of the soul that would spurn the grovelling scenes of this sublunary sphere, and soar aloft toward heaven; in amalgamating the whole mass of mankind into one promiscuous crowd of ignorance and brutality.

(3) See Baron de Lotti's memoirs, for an account of this beautiful, but fatal plant.

We may, however, look forward with confidence to the time, when the wide extension of the Christian religion shall put an end to all the encroachments of superstition. Wherever that religion is spread, (to borrow the expressive language of scripture,) the wilderness & solitary place are glad, the desert rejoices & blossoms as the rose; — barbarism & darkness receive the beneficial light of civilisation, and superstition "hides her diminished head". The age is without doubt, rapidly approaching so long foretold of yore, when battle shall unyoke the

"— red dragons of her iron car," —

when

"Grim visaged war shall smooth his wrinkled front,"

and religion and science, hand in hand, shall extend the sceptre of their sway to every portion of the habitable globe, & wave abroad

"_____ to the farthest verge
"Of this green earth, to distant barbarous clime,
"Rivers unknown to song; where first the sun
"Gilds Indian mountains, or his setting beams
"Flames on th' Atlantic isles," —

the resplendent banner of liberty, harmony, civilisation, and peace.

E.